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By LBJ, NARA Date 10-26-95

Friday, August 18, 1967
2:55 p.m.

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Morse Proposal on De-escalation

You asked for a run-down on the proposal for de-escalation made by Congressman F. Bradford Morse (Rep. of Mass.).

In essence, the proposal is:

(1) we approach the North Vietnamese through secret diplomatic channels;

(2) we would agree to progressively limit our actions if they did the same;

(3) our first step would be to stop all bombing north of the 21st parallel for 60 days;

(4) in that period, they would take their first step;

(5) if they did what they had promised, we then would stop bombing north of the 20th parallel;

(6) their actions (known to us in advance) and our phased stopping of bombing by parallels down to the 17th would follow in sequence.

If at any stage, they didn't do what was promised, we would be free to resume bombing. Each step would have to take a form that was verifiable.

Comment:

This general plan -- and many other variants -- have been considered by the Administration, especially by those who work full time on Viet-Nam affairs.

It is certainly one approach that might be tried and to which Hanoi might at some point respond favorably.

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But the key element of the plan is missing.

That is: previous discussion with Hanoi in secret, and general agreement between us on a mutual program of cutting back military action -- i. e., our reducing bombing, their gradually cutting back infiltration of men and supplies.

We have tried repeatedly to get Hanoi to agree to just such secret discussions. We have said we are ready to take up anything they might propose in such talks. We have assumed that, if such talks should start, the kind of proposal Mr. Morse advances -- and many other approaches -- could be tried out.

Thus far, Hanoi has been totally unwilling to enter into any talks with us.

And, as Morse agrees, advance discussion and mutual understanding are absolutely necessary to the success of his proposal.

Incidentally, Morse is completely wrong when he says: "The Administration insists on publicly putting the Government of North Viet-Nam on the spot by insisting that she back down first."

That is not the Administration's position.

In fact, our position is just about what he suggests: secret talks first, then reciprocal steps by the two sides. And with agreement from Hanoi, we are ready to take the first step.

William J. Jorden

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